DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 478 210 TM 035 077

AUTHOR Johnson, Mary; Munoz, Valerie; Street, Emma

TITLE Building Parents as Researchers.

PUB DATE 2003-04-22
NOTE 12p.; Contributions from Parent-U-Turn.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS Activism; Adult Education; *Educational Improvement; *Educational Research; *Parent Participation; *Parents; Research Methodology; Researchers; Summer Programs

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a program in which parents learned about becoming educational researchers and developed research skills they could use for school improvement. Parent-U-Turn is a parent organization in Lynwood, California and surrounding communities that has worked with researchers from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) to procure and gather information about quality schooling. In a summer program, members of Parent-U-Turn studied the history of education and the workings of the social reproduction cycle at UCLA. They also learned research and information gathering techniques that they subsequently applied in focus groups in their communities and in data collection that included interviews with teachers in their children's schools. The parent participation enhanced by taking part in Parent-U-Turn's summer program will be translated into improved education in the schools. (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Building Parents as Researchers
By Parent-U-Turn

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M. Johnson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
2A

ED 478 210

Introduction

Parent-U-Turn (PUT) is a parent organization that has worked with UCLA researchers and is made up of parents from Lynwood and its surrounding cities. Our organization has an estimated 200 members. Parent-U-Turn consists of parents, grandparents, politicians, activists, advocates, and teachers. The majority of Parent-U-Turn members range in age between 30 and 65, and have no formal degrees but a lot of civic pride. Parent-U-Turn is a multicultural organization with many nationalities and programs for schools that seek to address how parents can best assist their schools in creating a successful learning environment. Our responsibility in the community is in procuring and gathering information on quality schooling. Our organization can best be described as a professional development program for parents. Parent-U-Turn members have a sophisticated understanding of what good teaching and learning should look like in the classroom and have struggled with some of the broader issues of diversity and equity for all students. The key issues for Parent-U-Turn members are improving the educational opportunities of disadvantaged urban students.

Lynwood and other cities that Parent-U-Turn serves are located in the southeast area of Los Angeles County. Lynwood is five miles from Watts and twenty miles from Long Beach. The community of Lynwood covers a five miles radius and is 70% Hispanic and 30% Afro-American. Majority of Lynwood students receive free lunch. A great number of residents work for the Lynwood Unified School District (LUSD) or city of Lynwood.

TM035077

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The majority of thepopulation work in factories or in the service industry for minimum wage.. The unique thing about Lynwood is the different cultures and pride of the "peoples." Parents in Lynwood are hard workers and take much pride in doing things that improve their community, such as, being Neighborhood Watch captains and volunteering for local clean-up of their neighborhood. These parents are now demanding quality access to education for all students.

Parents Becoming Advocates

In Lynwood, the school system has a high number of uncredentialed teachers. LUSD has failed to allow parent involvement in any decision-making roles. Every time parents voice their opinion, the district slaps them down. LUSD doesn't respect parents as resources, only as bathroom monitors and fundraisers.

Currently, the middle schools and high schools are unsafe because of drugs and gangs. Four years ago our children were failing and we had no idea why. Our children were scoring very low on SAT 9 tests, and the overall school API rate was very low. The classrooms are dirty, with mice and heavy pigeon droppings in the air conditioners and heating ducts. There is a lack of security guards to keep students and staff safe from gang related problems, drugs and fist-fights between students.

Parents in Lynwood became involved with UCLA in 1997 for staff development regarding quality/state standard curriculum. Parents were invited to participate in the Center X Parent Project to learn how to improve parent involvement with their children's schooling. For six years, Parent-U-Turn has participated in parent educational training as part of UCLA's Parent Project, an organization that has created and implemented exemplary programs for parents in several communities.

Since 1997 Parent-U-Turn members and other parents have put theirtraining to use by teaching other parents about school procedures and students; rights. Parents help other parents by filling out uniform complaints and attending Individual Evaluation Process (IEP) meetings with parents as advocates. We are no longer asking for accountability. We are now demanding accountability. We are teaching parents that it's okay to take on LUSD for changes. For instance, we were able to mobilize parents regarding food that schools were serving our children. Parents were able to demand the district to change food vendors. Another example occurred when Parent-U-Turn filed a uniform complaint with the district for violating its own by-laws by electing a president that was an employee of the district. The first and second stage of our appeal was denied, but we appealed to the superintendent and won.

Three years ago we met John Rogers, associate directors of the Institute for Democracy, Education & Access (IDEA) and a researcher at UCLA. We, as parents, knew how bad the conditions of our schools were, but we didn't know how to gather this information together to forge some kind of accountability for our students. We wanted to gather data from parents of students that attended schools in our district and believed that the data would document or verify how an environment with these conditions affects the students academically and socially. Learning how to research issues of access to quality education is the only way to change our community and promote a safe and effective educational environment for all students. Parent-U-Turn members attended monthly IDEA meetings to study school conditions and the research process. After the class ended, parents were invited to attend a summer seminarto learn more about becoming a researcher and research techniques and skills.

Parents Becoming Researchers

Last summer, as students of Urban Sociology at UCLA, we learned about the history of education and how the social reproduction cycle works. We, as parents, got a better understanding of how and why schooling came to existence. We gained a better understanding of why the school system was failing in educating people of color. The education system was developed around teaching white males of elite status. We have all heard about Brown vs. Board of Education, but last summer we were able to compare the case to the conditions in today's schools. Every situation that exists, such as, segregation, lack of materials and lack of access to quality education, has been recycled from the past and, 50 years later, we are again at the crossroads in education. For example, our children are forced to take the Exit Exam to get a diploma, to satisfy politicians who have failed to advocate and demand accountability from local schools. This summer we also learned how to mobilize people for change.

This past summer, parents at UCLA also became researchers and learned how to have some means of tracking teacher quality and access to quality education for students. This summer we learned many methods of gathering data, such as, audio-taping, interviewing techniques, parent checklists, observations, focus groups, videotaping and surveys.

The summer was an amazing experience for parents in becoming researchers. As researchers parents were able to conduct focus groups with a group of high school students about school conditions and the lack of school materials. In the past, parents never had a chance to ask students what they needed to be successful in school. The students this summer were very eager to share their school experience with us. When we first entered the classroom at Jordan High School the teacher was uncomfortable. When

the teacher saw that students were relaxed, the teacher started to share his experience. As parents conducted focus group some of the students could relate to some of the teacher's experiences. Common experiences were a lack of restrooms available and of materials for teachers and students to use. This was a concern for teachers and students,

Many students were concerned about not being able to see their school counselors. Some students who were in the tenth and eleventh grade had not ever seen their counselors. We asked the students if they knew the definition of curriculum, and no one could tell us. As parents, now we knew why students from this school were not making the grade.

After leaving the classroom we went to the cafeteria to do a focus group on teachers and principals. We feared we wouldn't get the teachers to see that traditional education wasn't reaching our children. We were just parents with no formal degrees and all teachers have some kind of credential. We wanted to help the teachers to see the conditions that our children have to experience while attending non-performing schools. To our surprise, some teachers were able to relate because they were teaching at schools just like the schools in our community.

The parents decided to expand our research out to the malls and local shopping centers to interview a variety of parents regarding the conditions in their children's schools. When we got to the mall we felt very uncomfortable stopping people and asking questions. In our research we found that most people are in a rush. The mall was a good idea for a place to conduct surveys because we were able to collect a variety of information that was helpful in gathering data across the school districts. After gathering data we came to the conclusion that all schools had similar or the same problems. Some

of the same problems were that their schools did not have enough restrooms, credentialed teachers, materials and school counselors. Most parents believed that their children weren't getting a quality education. The surveys done at the malls reflect our belief that all students don't have access to quality education.

The most amazing thing about this summer was that parents and students attended class together. This was a research project in itself for bridging the gap. At first, we as parents, were talking *at* the students. As time went on everyone began talking and listening to one another. The students were sharing their experiences and the parents were listening. Parents and students learned how to respect each other and found common ground to build a workable relationship to make changes together.

After Summer Seminar

Parent-U-Turn and other parents from different surrounding cities have been coming together at the Parent Leadership Institute classes that are held at UCLA to examine the school accountability report card (SARC). The SARC is supposed to report on the inner running of each school. We found that schools left out information parents would like to know. For instance, how many teachers are certified, how many teachers have doctorate degrees and how many teachers are teaching out of their subject matter.

We are most proud of our effort to establish a Students Bill of Rights at the local level. Students, parents, and advocates that seek access to quality education for all students in California drafted the bill. The Bill made it through the first committee in Sacramento and got tagged for a "million-dollar cost" in the second committee. At this time the bill is suspended. This past fall there was a congressman that wanted to bring a national student's bill of rights. tSomeone recognized that it is a good idea that every

student should have access to quality education regardless of economic status, nationality, or religion.

Parents gained recognition for research work done after summer seminar. Parent-U-Turn parents' surveys were used in the lead editorial of the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper. I think this was a proud day for all of us, including John Rogers, our teacher. To see the data that we gathered in writing in a major paper was an awesome feeling. We feel lucky because we are the new kids on the block and some researchers never get their work published.

Challenges and Tension Between PUT and Professional Research/Activist Community

'While we have gained much from our work with UCLA/IDEA, we have run into some tensions and obstacles as well, particularly in our interaction with IDEA'S partners and other UCLA researchers. PUT members come from a community that is predominately Hispanic and Afro-American, and low income. UCLA is located in a high income and predominately white neighborhood. PUT invited members of the UCLA faculty to spend a day in our neighborhood and there were no takers. Parents felt that UCLA faculty or staff were afraid to leave the comfortable zone of the rich and famous to see how other half lived, the people they like to do research on. In our opinion, researchers exhibited little social skills Althoughthey are highly educated by book learning, they seem to have very little knowledge of what real "peoples" are about. For instance, one UCLA colleague asked PUT to train her parents, but didn't believe that parents needed to be paid. This colleague was detached from reality in thinking that parents aren't human and that we were asking for "something for nothing." The only thing

we wanted from her was to be paid for our work in empowering her parents with leadership skills to improve parent involvement at her school site. It seems like she has a double standard, one for her colleagues and another for parents. This same colleague also had an after school tutorial program and she closed it down without discussing this with parents. The parents of students that attended her program weren't allowed in the process to participate in the decision to close down the program. Where were the social skills or respect in this situation? Sometime parents feel like we are just a number on a chart or graph. At times female or women researchers seem to relate more to the struggles of disadvantaged urban communities. This might be because females at UCLA had to struggle and work harder because they work in a male dominated field. In our experience women researchers at UCLA are more open to change or embrace the differences in our culture and use it as a resource. Sometimes it seems like the male researchers want to change our way of speaking and writing to proper English. We feel that women are more flexible. In our community sometimes mothers allow their children to make mistakes, and the fathers are the disciplinarians. At UCLA, the men stick to the rules and the women take many pathways to get where they want to go. We do understand where the males researchers are coming from and we want to be equal in their world of research and we understand that proper English is one tool that is needed in this field. However, PUT members speak slang and broken English. We, as parents, struggle to keep our identity because it's important to us and we like who we are. Our community relates to us because we speak like them and this is what we need to build trust and be good researchers. People must be able to relate to the person asking the questions. The wording of the survey we used to gather data was written by UCLA researchers and doesn't reflect the

wording or phrases that a lot of community members use. Researchers must reach out to the community not just in the communities' native language, but also in street language or the slang of that neighborhood.

We, as a parent organization, also have some major differences with UCLA in our beliefs and values. At times people at UCLA seem to only want to take on challenges that they know they can win. On the other hand, PUT takes on issues that seem to be a lost cause because for us it's not about always winning, but about standing up for what we think is right. PUT has different goals and objectives than researchers. While they seem to want to write books, we want to make changes in our community, We have worked with some of UCLA's partners, a famous civil rights law firm and we felt that it was all about helping them. The firm asked PUT to help gather parents for a statement on the conditions of the schools for upcoming cases in November, and we went out to the community and recruited parents for them. When it came time for parents to ask them for help, the doors were always closed. LUSD has been out of compliance with NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND Laws for parent involvement section 1118 (D). Parents asked the firm for help in bringing LUSD to accountability on this issue and were told that this wasn't an issue that they are working on this year. These are some reasons why people are pissed off at UCLA. UCLA does a lot of work with partners that don't reflect the theory of the University.

We learned that some UCLA researchers have no clue what teamwork is all about. They are all about what is in it for them. PUT has to work together in unity for the survival of what parents need,

Parents need researchers to volunteer their time in disadvantaged neighborhoods and empower parents' and students' research skills so they can effect changes for the betterment of their schools. All we need is to be taught how to change our community and we'll do the rest. Researchers need to come out of the classroom and share their knowledge to help people learn ways to raise the conditions that are sub-standard and bring about accountability. For example, Dr. Rogers has helped PUT to start bringing accountability to a school district that has a continuing pattern of failing our children. Parents were able to document that uncredential teachers are placed in neighborhoods based on income level. The research we collected shows that low-income neighborhoods have the highest rates of non-credentialed teachers and this is reflected in their very low test scores on state standardized tests.

Parents need to feel respected for their culture. For example, one of UCLA's collaborates, LA Metro's founder, came into our communities and didn't teach us, but dictated to us what he thought we should believe. LA Metro wanted to come into our community and only validate people that thought like them. We need to be taught and not dictated to. We are looking for someone to coach and empower us to help ourselves. We need organizers and researchers to gain more human connection to parents. For example, Dr. Rogers is always there for parents. What we like about John is that he is open for growth and we will always meet him half way. We can count on John for any school problems or personal issues, he is always there giving a helping hand. Parents have a need to be spoken to in languages or wording that fits in their culture. We need researchers to build relationships with the community and not be detached from us.

Parents need more individuals like Angela Hasan and Solange Belcher. Angela has built a relationship with parents throughout the "hood." Angela is a coach and a motivator who empowers parents with respect and compassion. Angela also is a researcher and because of her social skills she is able to move freely among the people in the community. What makes Angela and Solange unique is how they respect everyone's opinion and differences. Angela and Solange both embrace parents' culture and support the empowerment of parents as equal.

Conclusion

Parents need to empower themselves with research skills, while maintaining their own identity. Parents must reach outside their neighborhood for assistance and build relationships with different collaborations for change. Last summer was the greatest opportunity for PUT to experience college as researchers. Thanks to John Rogers and his colleagues at UCLA, parents are now researchers across Los Angeles County. Our organization will continue to voice a powerful commitment to college as a pathway to economic security, political power, and greater wisdom.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

TM035077

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Building Parents as Researchers

Author(s): Mary Johnson, Valerie Muñoz, Emma Street

Corporate Source: Parent-2-Turn

Publication Date: 4-22-03

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

☐

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

☒

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

☐

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, please

Signature: Mary Johnson	Printed Name/Position/Title: MARY Johnson President
Organization/Address: 9111½ San Gabriel Ave SGC	Telephone: 323-564-8541 FAX:
	E-Mail Address: mjadvocate@earthlink.net Date: 6-18-03

(Over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, *or*, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
1129 SHRIVER LAB
COLLEGE PARK, MD 20742-5701
ATTN: ACQUISITIONS

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfacility.org

EFF-088 (Rev. 2/2001)